THE MYSTIQUE TASIK CHINI

Rediscovering nature and the indigenous dwellers of the beautiful Lake Chini.

In the southern portion of Pahang, about 100 kilometres from Kuantan and 60 kilometres west of the Royal Town of Pekan, lies another of Pahang’s unique attractions, Tasik Chini or Lake Chini.

The beauty and mystique of the lake continues to mesmerise visitors although it has been more than one year since the report in the local dailies that Tasik Chini, the country’s second-largest freshwater lake, is contaminated with high levels of e-coli—the bacteria that may have caused rashes and diarrhoea among the Orang Asli living near it.

BACKGROUND ON TASIK CHINI

The 5,026 hectares Tasik Chini is made up of a conglomerate of 12 lakes. The lake offers tranquil and peaceful surrounding steeped in myths and legends that have remained unexplained to this day.

Legend has it that a mythical beast dwells within its depth in the lake and acts as the guardian to the lost city of Khmer, which was once situated here. Local inhabitants have reported seeing the mystical beast whose existence has yet to be scientifically proven. They also believe that the lake is home to a dragon (not unlike the infamous Loch Ness monster of Scotland).

Tasik Chini is endowed with rich biodiversity lush tropical wilderness that is home to 138 species of flora, 300 species of non-aquatic live and 244 species of fresh water fish, namely toman, terubu and corma. Between August and September the lake is transformed into a floating garden with...
thousands of white and pink lotus flowers covering the surface.

Fishing is a popular activity at the lake and the best time to go angling is between November and January when the monsoon increases the size of the lake. A motorboat can take you across the lake, passing under forested canopies to an Orang Asli settlement where you can try your hand at the blowpipes. Basic, angling and canoeing are pleasurable at Tasik Chini.

The source of the water for this awesome lake comes from the 4.8 kilometres Chini River. The Chini River is the only river draining into the Pahang River from the lake. Moving along this narrow river is like entering into the distant past when man and nature were one, before man retreated into shells of steel and concretes.

As you travelled down the river with your boatman skilfully steering the boat, you will be able to feast in the unique flora and fauna, right from monitor lizards, black and red broadbills, kingfishers, squirrels and monkeys. If you are planning to make a boat trip up the river, make sure to tell your boatman not to speed. That is the only way to take in what the jungle has to offer.

There are several places to consider if you are thinking of staying overnight at Tasik Chini. This depends on the type of accommodation and one’s budget. Tasik Chini Resort is a more established set-up with chalets, team-building activities and a restaurant.

**TREKKING TASIK CHINI**

For the more adventurous, Tasik Chini has a number of challenging routes through the jungle and swamps for off-road driving. The routes are only accessible by four-wheel-drives and provide enough excitement and adventure to please even the most demanding thrill-seeker.

Another kind of activity is jungle trekking, which is exciting yet educational. One will be able to see an amazing array of flora and fauna here in Tasik Chini. It is best to secure a guide in order to fully utilise and appreciate the natural surroundings.

For those interested in trekking, you can hire a local trekker to take you for a trek through a section of the secondary jungle that runs into tracks of palm oil plantations and old rubber plantations and then into another run of secondary jungle fringing the lake area.

The trek takes 5 to 6 hours to complete one way but not to worry, the boatman will pick you up at the end of the trek and whiz you back to Gumen for a late lunch. Usually the jungle walk can be arranged a day before with the *Batin* (the headman of the village). There are a number
of local guides who can take you on the trail and the standard charge is between RM35 and RM40.

Orang Asli handicrafts are also sold around the resort and around the Orang Asli settlements. Except for the sumpits or blowpipes, which are crafted by the local jakun, strangely the other items found here appear to have been made by the Semelai Tribes of Tasik Bera rather than the Jakun Tribe of Chini.

While trekking, you can spot flying squirrels gliding from the crown of a tree, high in the forest canopy. According to the guides, it is slightly easier to spot wildlife if it rains the night before, for the next morning the animals would be out to feed. The guides at Tasik Chini are not well versed with the English names of the variety of wildlife found there.

Along the walk, you can spot the Crimson-Winged Woodpecker (burung pelatuk), Pink-Necked Pigeons(punal), Lesser-tailed drongo(cawi), Common lora (burung illin), Spiderhunter (sasai) and the Orange bellied flowerpecker (kryet).

The guides will show you how the jakun hunters make traps to snare small animals such as squirrels and rats for food. The Jakun people hunt with sumpits or blowpipes using small darts laced with poison collected from the Ipoh tree to paralyse the animal. The sharpened points of the bamboo darts were wrapped with bits of wool or bark to avoid any accidents when not in use.

There are numerous plants in the jungle that the jakun people have used for centuries to treat, cure, hunt with; for clothing, for food and to build their huts with. In the old days, they sometimes built platforms high above ground, supported on all four corners by sturdy trees.

Skillfully woven roofs made from the Palas fronds (palm) sheltered them from the rain and in a corner of the platform they built open fireplaces. These basic houses kept them safe from wild animals such as elephants and tigers roaming on the forest floor. Although the jakuns, living in Tasik Chini have abandoned many of these practices, the older folk still remember the old ways of their ancestors.

**THE FUTURE**

Visitors come to Tasik Chini for a variety of reasons. To reflect, to ponder, to rediscover, to reap the harvest of the lake, to appreciate and others, well - just because it’s on their tour itinerary. Tasik Chini creates a sense of being. A sense of nostalgia.

The myths and legends shrouding the lake provide a feeling of preservation. The preservation of the lost city, its serpent and now, it is up to mankind to once again listen to the call of nature before she releases her wrath.

Nonetheless, there is still so much hope for Tasik Chini. The ecosystem is trying desperately to adapt to the changes made. The lotus that once spread across large areas of the lake is blooming once again; new growth is taking place.

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